

Gas, bloating, fiber? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

After every meal, I get serious gas, bloating, and other yucky stuff. This is with ALL kinds of foods. I'm taking fiber for constipation, which is cool, but I get messed up even long after I take my fiber. What's the story?

— Pooped out

Answer

Dear Pooped out,

Gas can be uncomfortable for you, and those around you, too! There are a number of reasons you may be having gas, but it sounds like you've begun to associate the flatulence with fiber. Can you pinpoint when your stomach started getting fussy? Was it after you began the fiber supplements? Increasing fiber intake too quickly is certainly one route to bloating or gas. If your fiber is coming in the form of a supplement, you may want to cut the dose and increase it gradually until your system adjusts. Additionally, you could consider getting fiber from whole fruits, [vegetables](#) ^[2], and [grains](#) ^[3], rather than using a supplement, which may help prevent a fiber overload.

Gastrointestinal (GI) upset that occurs after every meal could also be a sign of a medical condition. You may want to consider making an appointment with your health care provider. One relatively common condition is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a GI disorder with no identifiable cause experienced by ten to twenty percent of people in the United States. It can produce chronic abdominal pain, constipation, gas, diarrhea, and bloating. Other IBS symptoms may include mucus in the stool and feeling like you need to have a bowel movement even after you've had one. For people with IBS, the intestines contract too hard or not hard enough, making food move too quickly or too slowly through the digestive tract. Stress, large meals, or menstruation can all exacerbate symptoms. Certain foods may also increase IBS symptoms in some people. These include caffeine, alcohol, chocolate, fat, sorbitol, fructose, gas-forming legumes, and dairy products (if you're lactose intolerant). Less common, [Crohn's disease](#) ^[4] is another condition that may bring on some of the symptoms you describe.

Food allergies and/or intolerances cause GI distress in many people as well. Common food allergens include dairy, wheat, [gluten](#) [5], [peanuts \(and many other nuts\)](#) [6], legumes, soy, eggs, corn, and a slew of other foods. Fortunately, with help from a health care provider, testing, and/or careful food journaling, many people with allergies are able to isolate the one or two foods that bother them and cut them out of their diet. Celiac disease, an auto-immune disorder, is another food-related ailment that can cause gas; people with Celiac disease cannot tolerate gluten (the protein in wheat, barley, and rye). Some people with Celiac disease experience GI symptoms like gas and bloating, as well as a number of other symptoms.

Finally, stress, anxiety, excitement, and other sources of emotional upheaval can lead to many somatic symptoms, including gas. In these cases, stress management activities, like regular exercise, [meditation](#) [7], [yoga](#) [8], and talking to friends and/or counselors, may be useful.

While there is no sure way to diagnose your internal grumblings over the Internet, some behavior changes may help alleviate symptoms. Here are some tips:

- Eat a balanced diet low in fat and high in fiber (but remember to increase your fiber intake gradually, to avoid shocking your system!).
- Drink plenty of water.
- Experiment with eating several small meals a day instead of three large ones.
- Work on managing stress.
- Avoid laxatives — they may weaken the intestines or cause dependence.

Knowing what to do to alleviate your gas is one thing; actually making the changes is another. If you need assistance identifying the root of your symptoms, or support in making changes to help get rid of the gas, you may want to visit your health care provider or a registered dietitian.

Best of luck identifying the culprit and achieving gastrointestinal comfort,

Alice!

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Published date:

May 01, 1994

Last reviewed on:

Aug 07, 2014

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